

THE HARD TIMES.

A

DISCOURSE,

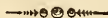
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SECOND UNITARIAN CHURCH,

PORTLAND, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1837.



BY JASON WHITMAN.




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DISCOURSE.

WE hailed the commencement of the year, my friends, from these sacred places, with songs of joy and of hope. So, from these same sacred places, we are this day to bid the year adieu, in songs of gratitude and of praise. The associations, connected with this day, have brought forcibly to my mind the subject, upon which I addressed you at the commencement of the year. That subject, you will remember, was *THE HARD TIMES*. And, my friends, you stand in no need of being informed by me, that *the hard times* still continue. Let this subject then, *the hard times*, which was the theme of my discourse on the morning of the first, be the theme of my discourse on this, the morning of the last day of the year *eighteen hundred and thirty seven*. And let the same passage of scripture, which served as a motto on the former occasion, be the guide of our thoughts on the present.

“Can ye not discern the signs of the times.” Math. 16: 3.

We have now, my friends, been so long subjected to the pressure of these hard times, that we are enabled to discover some of the effects, which this pressure is actually producing upon the moral character of our community. These effects will of course vary in their character. While some are good, others will be evil. Some will experience the evil effects of these hard times, and in some cases the moral character will fall prostrate before them. Others will experience their good influences and will be morally improved by them. And, it will depend upon each individual's own desires and efforts, whether he will fall within the one class or the other—whether he will be morally ruined or morally benefited by the trials to which he may be subjected. Let us then enquire carefully into the effects, both good and evil, which the pressure of the times is actually producing.

I. And first,—*These hard times, have caused, and are causing much idleness amongst us.* Many of our most active men have become so embarrassed, as to be unable to proceed with their regular business. They are therefore thrown into comparative idleness. They may, indeed, employ themselves in efforts to close up their concerns in a prompt and honorable manner. But this is an unpleasant task, it does not call forth that life and activity, that zeal and energy, with which they have been accustomed to press forward. Their embarrassments have, in many cases, paralyzed their energy of spirit, and their bustling activity has given way to comparative idleness.

Then, there is a much larger class, who are directly and still more deeply affected by the state of the times. Where one active and enterprising man of business falls beneath the pressure, several clerks and apprentices are thrown out of employment. And, in other cases, where men of business do sustain themselves, it is done by curtailing business, retrenching expenses and dismissing the employed. In this way a large number of young men, at the most interesting, the most important and the most dangerous period of life, are thrown out of their accustomed employment, and compelled, as they probably imagine, to spend their time in idly waiting for an opening in business, or for the return of better times; and contracting in the mean time, those habits which threaten to undermine their principles, destroy their characters and to subvert their hopes.

Still further, the different classes and occupations of society are bound most closely together. Embarrassments in one branch of business will, as an inevitable consequence, extend their influence to other branches. If the Merchant, for example, is embarrassed in his business, his ships must lie rotting at the wharves, and the seamen are dismissed. The timber lies rough hewn and neglected in the yard, or the hull is left half finished upon the stocks. Efforts to rear dwellings, stores or public buildings are checked. The bricks and the stones lie scattered in confusion around the selected site, the half finished cellar on the well prepared foundation,—and the mechanics of the various classes are left unemployed. And so it is, my friends, with

all classes and all occupations. We are bound most closely together by the strong bonds of mutual dependance. Whatever is for the interest, the real and permanent interest of one pursuit, will, collaterally and incidentally at least, promote the best interests of all the various branches of industry. We have proof of the truth of this general remark, in the facts which are every day staring us in the face. The yielding up of our men of business to the pressure, is felt in its consequences, by all the various branches of industry amongst us, and vast numbers of every occupation are thrown into comparative idleness, by these hard times.

Here then we have ascertained one of the positive evil effects of the pressure of the times. It has caused and is causing much actual idleness. But you are well aware that a state of idleness, a state, in which a man has no regular and engrossing pursuit to occupy his thoughts and employ his time, is one of the most dangerous states in which any man can be placed. The question then will arise, in the mind of every well-wisher to the community, whether this idleness be an unavoidable consequence of the state of the times. If it be not an unavoidable consequence, it is important that we should know it,—that so we may in future avoid it. And if it be an unavoidable consequence, it is equally important that we should know it, that so we may learn in what manner we can best counteract its evil influences. On this point, I would remark, that, without doubt, a certain degree of this idleness is the unavoidable consequence of the state of the times. Men are sometimes so peculiarly situated, in consequence of their embarrassments, that they can neither engage in active business where they are, nor leave to do the same elsewhere. Then too there are various other causes, which operate in connection with the state of the times, to produce, as an unavoidable consequence, much of the idleness which prevails. But, after having made this admission, I may say, that much of this idleness might be avoided, were it not for the prevalence of false notions. Let me notice some of the false notions.

The first prevalent and injurious notion, which I shall notice as false, is this :—That there are different degrees of respecta-

bility attached to the different occupations of society. There are some, who regard the professions,—the Clerical, Legal, and Medical professions, as, in themselves, more respectable than the occupation of a farmer,—who consider the merchant as engaged in a more respectable pursuit than the mechanic, and the mechanic than the day-laborer. So, in regard to females : there are some who regard the occupation of an instructress as more respectable in itself than that of the seamstress, and the occupation of the seamstress as more respectable than that of domestic service. And many there are, who regard the very circumstance that one is under the necessity of laboring for a support, as in itself derogating from his respectability. These notions do prevail. I have myself heard them distinctly expressed. I have noticed indubitable and wide spread indications of their existence, in enquires, allusions, and incidental remarks, to which I have listened. They do then prevail. But I contend, that morally and religiously speaking, they are false notions. I am indeed aware, that, constituted as society now is, a greater degree of attention and outward respect is often rendered to men of one occupation than to those of another, simply on account of the occupation itself, and without regard to the different characters of the different men. I am aware too, that in all cases, one occupation may seem, and may, in reality, be more important than another, and may consequently receive more of outward attention. But, I contend that, morally and religiously speaking, all occupations, which are in accordance with God's law and are calculated to promote the good of society, are alike respectable.

There are certain objects which every individual should endeavor to accomplish in life. These are, his own personal improvement in every possible way and to the highest possible degree, and, in addition to this, each individual should labor to promote, as far as may be in his power, the improvement and happiness of all within the sphere of his influence. That these objects may be accomplished, it is important that there should be a division of labor, a diversity of pursuits. Each individual, if permitted to devote himself principally to one particular pursuit, can become more skilful and perfect in that pursuit, can

better secure time and opportunity for his own intellectual and moral improvement, and can more effectually serve the community than he could if compelled to direct his attention to a great variety of pursuits.

But if two individuals are alike laboring, according to their means and opportunities, for their own intellectual and moral improvement, and are both striving alike to promote, to the full extent of their power and their influence, the happiness and the improvement of all around them, then surely they are both, in a moral point of view, equally respectable, although their occupations may be widely different. It matters not whether they be devoted to the labors of a profession,—of mercantile or mechanical employments,—to the labors of instructress, seamstress, or domestic service. If the individuals, I repeat, are equally devoted to personal improvement, and to the good of the community, then, in a moral point of view, they are equally respectable—then, in the eye of him who respecteth not the persons nor the employments of men, but hath respect only to character, they are alike respectable.

But, it is important to remark, that personal improvement is to be secured and the public good promoted, not by regarding our occupations, as too many seem inclined to do, as matters of secondary importance, and by diverting our attention to other things, which may seem to bear more directly upon these important objects. Would you secure your own personal improvement, you must do it by aiming at constant improvement in your pursuit. Should you neglect that, and aim at an acquaintance with every thing else, still there are the duties of your pursuit, which must be performed, either in a faithful or a negligent manner. These will distract your attention and prevent your making rapid improvement or becoming thorough in other things, while your attention to other things will prevent your becoming perfect in your particular pursuit. Therefore, would you secure personal improvement of character, you must aim principally at constant progress in the pursuit in which Providence has placed you, as long as there are indications of Providence that you are to remain in that pursuit. It is true, that, in order to avoid nar-

row and contracted views, and to obtain those which are enlarged and liberal, even of your own pursuit, you should look at that pursuit in its connections with and bearings upon other pursuits, and should seek the means of improvement in that pursuit, in a general acquaintance with various branches of knowledge. Still, I repeat, your attention must be principally directed to advancement and perfection in your own pursuit, if you would secure personal improvement of character. And so too, would you promote the best good of the community, you must strive to do it by faithfulness to your own duties in your own pursuit. Whatever then may be the pursuit, in which you are engaged, seek to secure your own personal improvement and to promote the good of the community by devotion to and faithfulness in that pursuit. But do not, I beseech you, regard the pursuit itself, whatever it may be, as, morally speaking, more honorable or respectable than every other that may be in accordance with God's will and required by the public good. Cherish the thought, that we are all most solemnly bound to spend our little space of time on earth, in laboring for our own improvement and for the good of the community, and, that it matters not in what sphere, occupation or pursuit we labor, provided we are diligent, faithful, and persevering in our efforts.

If then you will pursue the course and cherish the feelings to which I have alluded, you will not, when by a change of times, or by want of success after persevering efforts, you learn the indications of Providence,—you will not, I say, hesitate, under such circumstances, to leave one pursuit and engage in another, through fear that the pursuit, to which you may direct your attention, can be less respectable, than that which you may leave.

And this brings me to the point, in regard to which, I think these false notions are doing injury, are causing and perpetuating idleness. Men, who are thrown out of business in one station or pursuit, remain idle rather than engage in the labor of a different pursuit which they have regarded as less respectable. Men, who have been once actively engaged in mercantile employments, often spend years in comparative idleness under their

embarrassments, rather than engage in other pursuits, which they have been accustomed to regard as less respectable. And when our young men are thrown out of employment, as clerks in our stores, how unwilling are they to engage in mechanical or agricultural labors. How often do they leave these important interests to languish for the want of those devoted to their advancement, while they are themselves idly waiting for some new opening, some favorable change. Nay more, I have known the farmer, with a productive farm in one of the most beautiful towns in our land, unable to induce either of his sons to remain upon the homestead and succeed him in the labors of husbandry. They disliked the coarse dress, the hard and wearing toil, and the want of outward attention from others. And so, both must leave for the neighboring City ; for the counter or the counting-room of the City merchant. It is true, that at this time, a general paralysis has reached most branches of industry, in all parts of our land, and, consequently, there cannot be this ready resort to other pursuits, which might take place in other and better times. But still, there are, even now, more opportunities for securing employment in agricultural pursuits, at least, than there are young men, who have once been clerks or merchants, willing to avail themselves of these opportunities.

Let true and correct notions upon this subject prevail. Let it be understood that respectability attaches itself to conduct and character, and not to condition or occupation, and we should see many, who are now spending their days in comparative idleness, engaged in honest and honorable labor. But, especially, let that most foolish notion, that labor, and particularly that labor engaged in from necessity and for one's support, is disgraceful ; let this most foolish notion be at once banished from among us. Labor and laboring for one's support, disgraceful ! False, absurd—nay, dangerous notion ! How often is it the case, that the man or the woman, who makes your clothes, is, in a moral point of view, far more respectable than those for whom the labor is performed, and who walk forth among us as ladies and gentlemen in silks and superfine. Laboring for one's support disgraceful ! How many are there, who would be much more

respected than they now are, by all whose respect is desirable, were they to engage in some honest labor. Let these false notions, I say, be banished from among us, and there will be much less of idleness and, consequently, much less of suffering than there now is.

There is another false notion which prevails to some extent, and which is productive of evil, wherever it does prevail. It is this:—That we cannot be expected to be industrious, unless some object of industrious pursuit may present itself and demand attention. There are many, who will say, gladly would we be industrious could we find employment. But this is the difficulty, we can find no employment. And yet others in the same circumstances would be busily engaged. The one idly waits for employment, or only languidly seeks it; the other, either actively seeks or resolutely makes employment for himself. In near connection with this notion is another, not perhaps expressed, but often felt and practiced upon. It is this:—That it is useless to be busy, unless you can look forward to some outward profit or gain to be derived from your efforts. How often is it said, that one may as well do nothing as to labor with so little prospect of gain. This too is an incorrect view, a false notion. There is positive disadvantage in idleness—in being without employment of thought or body. There is positive benefit in being employed—in having the mind intent upon some object and in being actively employed in efforts to accomplish that object, even though the object itself may be of no great value. If you should determine, with an intensity of purpose, that you would ascertain the number of stones in the pavement of a particular street, and should spend days in the diligent employment of counting them, it will prove to have been better for you than to have spent these same days in idleness, in utter vacuity of thought and feeling, and in idleness of body. True, this is but busy idleness and, compared with well directed efforts for the attainment of worthy objects, it is of but little value; but, when compared with positive inactivity of both mind and body, it is valuable.

Let these false notions, one and all, be banished from among us. Let our young men feel that the truly industrious person, is not the one who waits for employment to come to him or be provided for him, but he, who can always find or make employment for himself. Let them feel that if there be no employment as clerks, and with merchants, there may be among Mechanics and Agriculturalists. Let them feel too, that, if no outward object demands their attention, they should resolutely employ themselves, for employment's sake. How many, for instance, are there among our young men, who, in this time of comparative idleness, could form themselves into classes, for the study of useful branches of knowledge. Every branch of study may become directly useful in future pursuits. And even if it should not, the very study will strengthen the mind, will aid in the formation of correct habits of thought, in awakening to mental activity, in opening resources of self-enjoyment. Let me then, my friends, urge you to banish at once from your minds the false notions I have noticed. Learn to respect character rather than condition, circumstances, or occupation. Learn to seek respectability in correctness of conduct, in worth of character. Learn to regard labor, honest labor, of whatever kind it may be, as far more honorable than idleness. Idleness! Would that I could awaken you to an inward dread—an utter horror of idleness, as the very worst and most dangerous condition, short of the actual pursuit of vicious courses, in which you can be placed.

II. I would mention, as a second evil effect of these hard times, *that they have been the means of increasing intemperance amongst us.* I need not dwell upon the evils of intemperance. These you have seen, and known and mourned over. These you have, many of you, been laboring to check and restrain. Your hearts, then, may feel deeply sorrowful, when I aver that, from my own observation, and from the testimony of others, with more extensive opportunities for observation than I have enjoyed, I am fully satisfied, that intemperance has, of late, increased to an alarming degree. This fact, I presume no one will deny. My position is, that this increase of intemperance is to be attrib-

uted, in some degree, to the influence of the hard times. But how does this appear? you may ask. I answer, in the first place, if an individual has ever been accustomed to the free use of ardent spirits, or if one does not, as a matter of principle and of conscience, wholly abstain from all use of the article, the very circumstance, that he is embarrassed, may drive him to excess—to indulgences, which in more prosperous times and under other circumstances he would have avoided. How many are the instances of men, who have indulged moderately when in prosperity—but who, when under the disheartening pressure of embarrassment, have fallen the victims of intemperance? How often is it the case, that those, who have broken off from habits of early dissipation, have, under the distractions and anxieties and mortifications of times like the present, returned to their cups. The very circumstance then, that a person is embarrassed, exposes him to the danger of ruin from intemperance. This danger is often increased by the false notions, which are entertained. Falsely regarding wealth as the proper ground of respect, they feel, that in the loss of property, they have lost the respect of their fellow men. Under the influence of this discouraging feeling they are tempted to yield themselves the willing victims of excited appetites, and bury their mortification in the forgetfulness and utter insensibility of absolute and loathsome inebriation. Thus you perceive that an increase of intemperance may be very naturally connected with,—nay more, may actually result from the pressure of the times.

Still further, the idleness, of which I have spoken as a consequence of the hard times, will lead directly to the same result, unless men act, in regard to this, from principle and abstain as a matter of conscience,—nay more,—unless every motive, which can possibly operate to guard against this danger, be strengthened in every possible way. If men, with no business on their hands, with nothing to engage their thoughts or occupy their time, assemble and spend first the forenoon, then the afternoon, and then perhaps the evening, in carelessly reading the news or indolently chatting together, it will be but a short time, before they will become the visitors of those places,

whence flow poverty, disease and death. I will not say, that there is no possibility, but I must say that there is no probability, that men, under such circumstances and while pursuing such a course, can withstand the temptations by which they will be assailed. Do I speak too strongly? Do not observation and experience sustain the truth of my assertion in all its literal and awful force? How few are the men, who have spent any considerable time in this manner, without suffering in their moral character, without attempting to relieve the tedium of their idleness, by the exhilarations of the cup. And are not many amongst us, in consequence of their pecuniary embarrassments, thus idly spending their time? Nay more,—may I not put still another question, and ask if there are not *some* amongst us, who, in consequence of their embarrassments and while compelled, as they think, to pursue this course, are actually beginning to yield to the incipient advances of that fell destroyer INTemperance. I put the question, my friends, to your own observation. Is not Intemperance on the increase amongst us, and are not the causes, which I have noticed, actively at work to produce a still greater increase of the evil? Is this a natural or a necessary consequence of the hard times? I have shewn that it is a natural, I do not believe it to be a necessary consequence. And how is it to be avoided? I answer, by increased watchfulness and energy, in self-government, on the part of those who are exposed, and by increased vigilance in effort on the part of all friends of Temperance and of the best welfare of society. Has any one of you, my friends, thought that, even in ordinary times, the occasional use of ardent spirits is dangerous? Consider that such occasional indulgence is doubly dangerous now. You are surrounded by powerful, outward influences, all tending directly to draw you into this vortex of ruin. Make it then, I beseech you, a matter of principle, a matter of conscience before your God, never to taste the dangerous article, unless at the prescription of your physician. And remember, that if it require great strength of principle, to enable you to withstand in ordinary times, it will require additional inducements to enable you to withstand now. Make it then, not only a matter of conscience

before your God, but a matter of social pledge to your friends and the community, to abstain at once and entirely. Need I say more ? I must make one direct and affectionate appeal.

Is there one man now before me, who is in the habit of using ardent spirits ? To him I say :—Friend, brother, I do beseech you, and most earnestly entreat, in the name of God who loves you and would see you happy ; in the name of Jesus who gave himself to the death of the cross to save you ;—I do beseech you, by your regard for the feelings of wife, children and friends ; I do beseech you, by all your hopes of happiness on earth, and by all your hopes of happiness or fears of misery beyond the grave ; I do beseech you, renounce at once, entirely and forever, all use of this dangerous and destructive article. And is there one young man now before me, who is but just beginning to yield to the beguilement of the cup ? To him I would say, my young friend and brother, I warn you, as with the voice of prophecy, which foresees the insidious progress and the fatal result of the indulgence to which you are beginning to yield ; I warn you, as with the voice of inspiration, which saith, “no drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of heaven.” Yea, with all the affection which one human heart can feel for another, I most solemnly warn you to beware. Beware, I say, before it be too late. Young man, friend, brother, thou who art just raising the cup to thy lips,—relying, in fancied but false security upon thine own moral strength to enable thee to stand firm, whenever thou mayest be disposed to stop,—to you, I say again, *beware ere it be too late*. I have done.

O God,—Our father in heaven, hear our prayer. Give those who have already yielded and are now slaves to their appetites—give them we beseech, strength to abstain. And, awaken we beseech thee, those upon the verge, to a true sense of their danger.

III. The third evil effect of the hard times, and the last which I shall now notice, is, that *they have produced and are producing coldness and apathy of feeling in regard to moral, religious, and benevolent efforts*. I do not mean, that we are not so active or so liberal in the promotion of these objects as

before. That is not to be expected. Indeed, I must say that, in regard to the annual contributions for our various charitable societies, there has been manifested a greater degree of liberality, than could have been expected, when we consider how much the means of giving have been diminished. This is not the point to which I refer. I refer to a want of interest in moral and religious improvement among ourselves, and in efforts for the promotion of sound morals and pure religion abroad. Those, who once seemed deeply interested in personal religion, have become so engrossed with pecuniary anxieties, that they have lost all appearance of interest. They may perhaps attend as regularly as ever upon the means of religion. But there is no appearance of that deep feeling, that strong and pervading personal interest. So too, if you speak upon any of the moral evils, which prevail in the community. There are many, who will admit the truth of what you may say, but who will turn away in cold indifference. There seems to be no life, feeling or interest. Still further, if you ascend a step higher, and speak of the importance of efforts for man's spiritual improvement—for the spread of truth and the advancement of piety—you are met with the same chilling coldness. It is not that men say we are not now able to give. It is that, by their conduct, they seem to say, we do not wish to hear or think of these things. I do not complain of the want of liberal donations and contributions to these objects. What I wish, is feeling and interest, manifested by actual efforts and by small contributions according to our diminished means. If one cannot give for these purposes, he can pray for their advancement. But the difficulty is, that men not only give but little, but they pray more languidly than they should. I am satisfied, my friends, that this state of coldness and apathy in regard to moral, religious and benevolent efforts, does prevail to a considerable extent.

There was a different, though I know not that it was a better state of feeling upon these subjects, before the hard times commenced. Then, if you asked men to attend to your statements upon these subjects, they might perhaps, in their confidence that they possessed or should secure exhaustless wealth, they might

have thrown you a purse or put down their names for hundreds, but they could not stop to listen to you. Their conduct seemed to say, we have a good operation in prospect. Do not hinder us by asking us to hear, read, or think upon these subjects, but just state, in the briefest possible manner, how much you want and it shall be made up. This, I say, or something like this was the state of feeling before the hard times commenced. This was, as I think, a bad state of things. For it is more important that men should read, think, and feel upon these subjects, than it is that they should merely contribute to their advancement. It is more important that men should themselves become truly religious, temperate, and, in all things, morally correct, than it is, that they should merely contribute to the support of religious institutions and the spread of good morals. But, if there was a bad state of feeling then, must we not say, that there is no better state of feeling now. The disappointments, which have been experienced, the bringing down of high hopes, which had been suddenly and perhaps foolishly elevated, seem to have produced a general paralysis of feeling. But this ought not so to be. We ought to cherish deep sympathy and warm feelings—even if we cannot give.

Let each man then, look to himself, and, as he feels this coldness and indifference to these important interests of the community creeping over him, let him bestir himself at once, considering, that this drowsiness and indifference to outward interests, is but the prelude to moral and spiritual death within. Have you my friend, in times past, felt deeply interested in personal religious improvement,—desirous even of making an open profession of your faith? And have these feelings passed away and given place to those of coldness and indifference? Let me assure you, that your condition is one of great and alarming danger. Give not then, I beseech you, sleep to your eyes or slumber to your eyelids, until by increased diligence in the use of all possible means of religious improvement and by increased fervency in prayer, you have sought to revive your former interest. Have you been deeply interested and actively engaged in plans of benevolence and philanthropy—

and do you find yourselves becoming cold and indifferent to these things? Struggle, I beseech you, struggle against this growing indifference. Let the embarrassments and anxieties of the times awaken you to increased zeal, earnestness and perseverance, and then will they become the means of your moral improvement and the aids to your spiritual progress.

IV. I am aware, my friends, that, in what I have thus far said, I have presented but a gloomy picture of the effects of the hard times. I believe what I have said to be the truth. But it is not the whole truth. The influence of the hard times is not wholly evil. In many particulars and with many individuals, it is good. It is important, then, that before closing, I notice the good effects of the times.

And, first, these hard times are altering men's notions as to the importance of wealth. During the fever, if I may so call it, which prevailed before the hard times commenced, almost every one seemed to be running mad in an excited chase after wealth. Not only the young and ardent, but the more advanced and moderate—not only those who had ever made wealth the object of their pursuit, but those too, who had professed to be seeking a better even an heavenly country, were carried away by the phrenzy of the times, and seemed to regard wealth as the grand panacea for all the ills of life. Personal improvement, domestic quiet, public good, all were forgotten for the time. The influence of this state of feeling upon the moral principles and religious character were most disastrous. Men, under the influence of excited hopes, became involved, beyond their ability to pay. And, consequently, when, by the change in the times, they became harrassingly embarrassed—they were assailed by temptations which proved in many cases too powerful for the principles and destructive to the character. A religiously disposed person can hardly look back, upon the state of feeling, which existed, and the devotion to wealth which was manifested, without trembling at the thought, of the great moral dangers to which men were exposed. But men are now compelled to reflect. They are taught the uncertainty of wealth. They find, to their surprise, that but little is absolutely necessary—that personal en-

joyment and domestic happiness may be secured without wealth. And, consequently, the influence of the times upon many will be, to give them more just and sober and rational views of life, of its objects and of the means of accomplishing those objects,—more just, sober and rational views of the real value and proper uses of wealth.

Again, these hard times have brought and are bringing many back from extravagant to more economical modes of living. Many are giving up, one after another, the indulgences to which they had been accustomed,—and are making gradual retrenchments in their modes of living. And this is an important as well as a beneficial result. Important, not merely on account of its influence upon the health and present happiness of the community. But it is important also in a moral point of view. When men are yielding to every indulgence, which appetite, fancy or fashion may demand,—these indulgencies become greatly magnified in their estimation. They are the subjects of conversation and thought, and are in great danger of being regarded as the essentials of life. It matters not what the indulgence may be, whether it be rich and fashionable dress—the luxuries of the table or splendid and elegantly furnished dwellings. The principle and the influence are, in some degree, the same. He or she, who possesses the means and is accustomed to unrestrained indulgence, will soon find the feelings absorbed in, and the affections devoted to these vain objects of indulgence. But when we are compelled to retrench, in these indulgences, we find that our life and our happiness do not consist in these things nor depend very essentially upon them. We soon cease to regard them as all important—we cease to be devoted to and to live for them. And, consequently, the same affections, which have been fastened upon these things, are directed to other objects. They may be directed to high and holy objects. And I have no doubt, but that many, who have heretofore been devoted to these vain, frivolous and unworthy objects—will, under the course of retrenchment they are called upon to adopt, become utterly indifferent to them. Still further, I have strong hopes that the affections, which have been improperly placed upon these things,

will, through the blessing of God, be directed to objects of real and permanent value—to the all important concerns of the spirit. All such will have cause to thank God that they have been called to endure the trials of these hard times—that by these trials they have been arrested in their career of folly and vanity, and brought back to the right exercise of their reason and the right appropriation of their affections.

Still further, these hard times, have awakened and are awakening many of our young men to a right improvement of the opportunity now afforded them, for intellectual and moral culture. A year since, as you will remember, I suggested to our young men the importance of forming themselves into associations for mutual intellectual and moral improvement. At that time, there was, I believe, but one such association in existence among us, and that in a languishing condition. There are now four such associations, and I know not but more, in our city—all well attended and in a flourishing condition. And these associations are doing good. Men may differ in regard to the degree of good which they are accomplishing, and some may contend that there are evils connected with them; but still, it must be admitted that they are doing good. Our young men are led by these associations to read, think and investigate. They are reading too, something more solid and substantial than the mere fictions of the imagination. They are seeking for solid and valuable information. And these are not unimportant results. How much better, to spend the time in this way, than in amusements and recreations which lead almost inevitably to dissipation? How much better than the mere frivolity and vanity of fashionable parties? And not only so, the habits they are acquiring may be of the greatest benefit to them in their future course. The habits of thought and reflection and examination, the habit of reading for some purpose, with a view to the accomplishment of a particular end,—these are all valuable habits and will have an important bearing upon their future intellectual character. And then too these habits, although they have a particular reference to intellectual improvement, will, we may hope, exert a powerful influence upon moral character. Ha.

who has accustomed himself to reflect and examine, to seek for truth and to read with a view to ascertain the truth, even though it be upon ordinary topics, will hardly stop with these. The habit he has formed will naturally carry him further. He will find himself, even before he is aware of it, reflecting and examining, seeking for the truth and reading for the purpose of ascertaining the truth, upon moral and religious subjects. The hard times, then, I contend, are awakening many of our young men to a right improvement of the opportunity which, in the general stagnation of business, is afforded them for intellectual and moral culture.

And this leads me to notice, lastly, another good effect of the hard times. It is this. They are operating, through the blessing of God, for the advancement of religion. Men are taught the uncertainty of earthly riches, the vanity of seeking for happiness in the possession of wealth, the folly of devoting time and talents to the accumulation of treasures on earth, where moth and rust corrupt and where thieves break through and steal. And there are many hearts upon whom lessons of this character will not be lost. They will be led to consider their ways—to look forward and see on what their hopes for the future may rest. Their hearts will be softened and prepared for the proper reception of Gospel truths. Feeling the utter insufficiency of all things below to satisfy the craving demands of their natures, they will be led, we may hope, under the blessing of God and the guidance of his spirit, to seek those treasures which are above. Their thoughts will be directed to eternal and heavenly things, and their affections fastened upon the purity and loveliness and stability of God's character and throne. Such, I believe, and such, I would hope, may be the effect of the hard times on some. They will find these temporal trials instrumental of spiritual good, and will have cause to look back, even from the regions of blessedness in the eternal world, with gratitude, upon them, as the means appointed and employed by God for the promotion of their spiritual and eternal welfare.

I have thus, my friends, dwelt upon some of the effects of the hard times. They are of two different classes—good and evil. Some will be benefited and improved by them—others will be injured and perhaps ruined by them, not merely in their worldly prospects, but in their moral character. It will depend upon each individual's own desires and efforts, whether he shall fall within the one class or the other. These are times which try men's principles and characters. Some will be purified and strengthened by the test to which they are put. Others will be found wanting in the hour of trial. And now my friends, this day, the last in the year, seems to invite us to the duty of self-examination in regard to the influence of the times upon our personal characters. Let us then, in a spirit of faithfulness to ourselves, put the question to our consciences—Are we yielding to the evil influences of the times—are we, as individuals, yielding to habits of idleness—falling before the ravages of intemperance, or becoming cold and indifferent in regard to moral, religious and philanthropic efforts? If so, it is time that we should be aroused from our danger—our stupor. Otherwise a moral paralysis will be the result—a paralysis, which can never be shaken off, but with a change of worlds—but with the revelations of the spiritual kingdom—but with the sound of the archangel's trump.

But if, on the other hand, we are becoming more sober and rational in our views of life and its objects—if we are becoming more moderate in our devotion to indulgences—if we are becoming more alive to the importance of self-improvement—if we are conscious of a growing interest in serious things and a deepening conviction that the soul needs what earth cannot give—then may we rejoice, even under the severest pressure of the times—then may we hope that, the trials to which we are here subjected, will be instrumental through the blessing of God, in purifying and training our souls, and fitting us for the happiness of heaven.

Respects of
David Roberts
et.

